THE DIRECTOR.

No. 2. SATURDAY, JAN. 31, 1807.

Causa latet, vis est notissima.

OVID.

Obscure the cause, but wonderful its power.

AMONG other communications from correspondents, I have received the following one from a learned and valuable friend; which, without any comment or observation on my part, I submit to the perusal of the reader. It is a letter On the Causes that affected the Progress of Antient Art.

Sir,

As in the useful but arduous task you have undertaken, you propose

to pay particular attention to the present state of the fine arts in this country, to whatever may tend to promote their improvement, and the patronage bestowed upon them, an enquiry into the 'causes that have affected the progress of the arts of design, in ancient and in modern times,' may probably not be unconnected with your object.

In every department of human enquiry, experience and analogy are the only sure guides: and to know what may be effected by human ingenuity and labour, it is necessary to know what *has already been done*, and the various means which have been employed. I venture upon this discussion merely as a general enquirer into the history of the human mind. I have no technical skill: none of the peculiar knowledge or tact of the connoisseur: all my observations may have been anticipated; or may be irrelevant. I offer them to you in the most humble manner; trusting, that you will altogether reject them, if they should

appear in your judgment undeserving of public attention.

Novelty, curiosity, the enthusiasm connected with objects of admiration before unknown, may all at first view be supposed to have operated in favour of the early sculpture of the Greeks, and the revival of painting in Italy. It might be conceived that a new art was followed with all the ardour of a first love; and that the faculties of inventors were necessarily more vigorous and lively than those of imitators and copyists. But this idea, though true in its general and vague expression, will scarcely coincide with refined views of the progress of the active powers of the mind.—The methods of art are slow in being attained; no one man can bring them to perfection; labour and time, and the industry of several generations, or at least of many minds, are required for the attainment of excellence. Master follows master, the scholar excels his instructor; the first works are inferior and insignifi-

cant; the origin of art is forgotten, its adult state alone is an object of admiration. The germ of the tree is unregarded, its blossoms scattered to the wind, and its mature fruit alone preserved.

Much has been said, and undoubtedly with considerable propriety, of the fortunate circumstances of the happy times, which favoured the progress of the improvement of art in Greece and Italy.

In Greece, in the most glorious age of sculpture, a patriotic and refined people existed in that state of society, in which the imagination is in its full vigour, in the rich spring of youth. Poets were enjoying an untouched field of interest. Philosophers were forming their own systems of logic, having no strict rules of thought, and carrying fancy into all their combinations. Warriors existed, animated by the desire of glory, public spirit, and all the grand virtues. Orators gifted with talents, that changed the fate of em-

pires, and made kings tremble on their thrones. Besides, in that country, beauty of person seems to have been eminent. The dress, the gymnastic exercises, and perhaps even the freedom of manners, were peculiarly favourable to the studies of the sculptor. The people were masters of gesticulation; and strength of action and the expression of passion seem even amongst the lower orders to have been softened by grace, and exalted by dignity. An universal sympathy existed with regard to the sublime, the beautiful, and the decorous. There was one vivifying spirit in the public mind,—The character of the artist was necessarily formed and modified by the popular feeling; and nothing was wanting to animate his hopes, and awaken his ambition.

In Italy, in the age of the Medici, in a more advanced though less romantic state of society, some of the same causes still operated. The genius of the southern nations naturally disposes them to activity and warmth in the intercourse

of society; and the expression of the human countenance is varied and impassioned. The period of the great Italian painters likewise was the period in which learning was reviving, in which the human mind began to awaken to day after its long slumber in the night of the middle ages. The era was distinguished by the progress of physical science, by the discovery of a new world, and by the triumphs of the Christian Faith. A state of general activity is necessarily favourable to every particular pursuit, and, above all, the arts were protected by princes and potentates; and fame and riches equally bestowed on the successful candidate.

The worship of the people, both at Rome and Athens, was exceedingly favourable to the progress of art. The age of idolatry, if not the favourite age of the moralist and the philosopher, is at least the fortunate age of the sculptor and the painter. The zeal of the puritans and early reformers of christianity,

in destroying paintings and statues, sufficiently proves the peculiar importance attached to these productions, in a religious point of view, by the church of Rome. And in early Greece, the temples of the gods were the theatres of the glory of the sculptors. The Jupiter of Phidias, and the Apollo of Praxiteles, were venerated, admired, and worshipped by a whole pagan world. Being essential to the magnificent ceremonials of a most magnificent system of superstition, the artist received, as it were, an apotheosis; and the adoration paid to the work became a supreme glory to the workman, and stamped a kind of divinity on the efforts of genius.

In Britain, at the present era, there are certainly no circumstances of equal brilliancy or magnificence; none so capable of exalting and purifying art.

We have undoubtedly beauty of person in a high degree, but in general it

is either concealed or disguised by fashion. The common dress of the people is rather simple and convenient, than graceful or picturesque. We are, generally speaking, firm, cool and reasoning, and not lively, active and impassioned; prudence, or the coldness of excessive refinement, banishes gesture almost entirely from the scenes of real life. It may be said, that this is no great evil, and that the artist may easily gain his ideas of grace, of beauty, and expression from the study of the antique, and that a few elements only are required to enable genius to produce new combinations. I fear, however, that this cannot be the case. The cold forms of the marble, or the superficial colours of the canvass, must necessarily affect the imagination less vividly than the warmth of real and active life, the at once palpable and expressive—the body and the soul. And it is astonishing how much the habitual and daily acquaintance with particular impressions affects the tone of the mind. The person confined

to a low country, who had never beheld a mountain district, except in representation, however great his powers of art, would imperfectly conceive, and still more imperfectly execute, an alpine scene. What applies to nature, will likewise apply to man, and with greater force; as it is more difficult to depict, without experience, action than stillness—living, than inanimate, forms. Our national subjects, undoubtedly, are grand and numerous. We have had Patriots, Orators, and Warriors, and scenes of triumph, at least as splendid as those detailed in the pages of antiquity. We have had, like Greece, a Demosthenes, and an Eschines; and men, who, like those of Sparta and of Thebes, have died for their country in the arms of victory. But to delineate such subjects would be in the highest degree difficult, even supposing the powers of the artist supreme. To paint in the truth and spirit of the historical style, would be to offend legitimate taste, by adopting a costume at once inelegant and incapable of expressing

dignified action: and to borrow the dress and fashions of antient times*, would be at once unreasonable, and offensive, in the highest degree, to our patriotic and popular feelings.

* Whatever arguments may be advanced in favour of adopting the modern dress in painting, I conceive none can be successfully advanced in support of this dress, as it affects sculpture. The following is extracted from Sir Joshua Reynolds's tenth discourse.

'The desire of transmitting to posterity the shape of modern dress must be acknowledged to be purchased at a prodigious price, even the price of every thing that is valuable in art. Working in stone is a very serious business; and it seems to be scarce worth while to employ such durable materials in conveying to posterity a fashion, of which the longest existence scarce exceeds a year.

'However agreeable it may be to the antiquary's principles of equity and gratitude, that, as he has received great pleasure from the contemplation of the fashions of dress of former ages, he wishes to give the same satisfaction to future antiquaries; yet, methinks, pictures of an inferior style, or prints, may be considered as quite sufficient, without prostituting this great art to such mean purposes.

'Sculpture is formal, regular and austere; disdains all familiar objects, as incompatible with its dignity; and is an enemy to every species of affectation, or appearance of academic art. Whatever partakes of

THE extraordinary wealth of many private individuals in this country, may, at first view, be supposed to be highly favourable to the patronage of the fine arts, and the encouragement of a pure taste; and this undoubtedly would be the case if all rich men were men of taste: but a certain general demand for pictures and portraits, at what may be called a mercantile rate, rather promotes mediocrity than excellence; and where the majority of purchasers are not en-

fancy or caprice, or goes under the name of picturesque (however to be admired in its proper place) is incompatible with that sobriety and gravity which is peculiarly the characteristic of this art.

'There is no circumstance which more distinguishes a well regulated and sound taste, than a settled uniformity of design; where all the parts are compact, and fitted to each other, every thing being of a piece. This principle extends itself to all habits of life, as well as to all works of art. Upon this general ground, therefore, we may venture to pronounce, that the uniformity and simplicity of the materials on which the sculptor labours (which are only white marble) prescribes bounds to his art, and teaches him to confine himself to a proportionable simplicity of design.'

Editor.

dowed with the gift of discernment, the majority of artists will not be found to bestow on their works the maturest deliberations of judgment or industry, and the highest polish of labour.

Though labouring under many disadvantages, this country, however, offers some peculiar traits, which may well afford high expectations and vivid hopes to the patrons of the British school of art.

Our natural scenes have characters of picturesque effect, of which no other country can boast; and this department of landscape is full of novelty, beauty and sublimity; and our eternal verdure, our pure streams, our wooded lakes, and mist-clad mountains, are equally fitted for the painter and the poet.

The exalted state of our physical science likewise, which, compared with that of all former times, is as the brightness of

noon-day to obscure twilight, offers untouched subjects in the calm and dignified departments of art.

In religion, if an enlightened system has limited the extent of the glory of the painter, it has not at all diminished his powers of execution. The objects of sacred design are still unexhausted. The first of poets of modern times has given to them the grandeur and effect of the noblest combinations of fancy: and the artist may find in 'Paradise Lost,' all the elements of the higher departments and sublimest functions of his art.

The talents of Reynolds, Wilson, Gainsborough and those of many able living artists, prove how much may be done.

The exertions that are now making promise excellent fruits.

The zeal displayed, by yourself and other ardent cultivators of all that tends

to the improvement of society, merits, on this occasion, the approbation of your country; I trust that it will not be applied in vain.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

Y.

Royal Society.

THE papers which have been lately read before this learned body are, an essay on the precession of the equinoxes, by the Rev. Abram Robertson, M. A. F. R. S. Savilian Professor of Geometry in the University of Oxford; and a letter on a subject of practical mechanics, by Davies Giddy, Esq. M. P. F. R. S. to the President: On Thursday, 22d January, the election of a Secretary, in the room of the late Dr. Grey, of the British Museum, came on, when H. Davy, Esq. was unanimously elected to that office. On the same evening the first part of a paper by Dr. Herschel, on the colours of thin plates was read.

Royal Institution.

THE LIBRARY of this Institution, of which a very short account appeared in the last number of The Director, is regularly increasing in the number and value of its books. The public may probably not be informed, that in *topographical* and *old English historical* works, it is extremely rich, from possessing the library of the late Mr. Thomas Astle; which was originally collected by the learned Philip Morant, author of the History of Essex. These books have a great number of MS. notes by many learned antiquaries. Of *scientific* publications, the library of this Institution has a very extensive collection; and in editions of the *Greek* and *Roman Classics* and *lexicographical* works, it is also very select. Among the publications relating to the *fine arts*, are the MUSEUM WORSLEYANUM, Stuart's Athens, &c. &c.

IN short, the collection in its present

state, though not so numerous as many other public libraries, affords a judicious selection of what is useful and interesting; and every facility of access to books is afforded to gentlemen in the several objects of their research.

THE subject of Mr. Davy's second lecture *on vegetable chemistry* was the organization of plants.

PLANTS exhibiting *life* only in their powers of assimilation and reproduction, display a very simple organization. A system of tubes for absorbing nourishment from the soil, a system of cellular membranes, for the exposure of their fluids to the influence of the atmosphere, constitute under different modifications all their interior organs. The sap rising from the minute fibrils of the roots through the vessels of the sap wood or alburnum is chemically altered in the leaves; much of its aqueous part evaporated, and its inflammable products increased: it appears to descend through

the vascular system of the bark, and the new parts are produced between the bark and the alburnum.

In the great anatomical division of the organs of plants, the epidermis seems to act as a defence to the living parts. The heartwood serves as the support and mould on which the new productions are formed; and the pith, scarcely visible except in annual shoots or young trees, is probably useful as a reservoir of moisture, to supply the first wants of the rising plant. The leaves absorb gaseous matter and moisture by their lower surfaces, whilst their upper surfaces perform the function of transpiration. The flowers are the reproductive parts, the pistils the bases of the seed, the anthers the agents of impregnation.

The Professor stated, that, though much had been discovered on the subject of the anatomy of plants by Grew, Malpighi, Ray, Linneus, Mirbel and Knight; yet still much more remained obscure and unknown. He recommend-

ed this department of enquiry as affording ample sources of discovery, and as capable of being prosecuted with facility, as requiring no apparatus but the microscope, no extensive preliminary knowledge, merely an eye to observe, and a hand to delineate. He recommended it generally to all persons possessing leisure, and a taste for philosophical research. He recommended it particularly to the female part of his audience, as fitted to their habits and pursuits, capable of affording much rational amusement, and as an elegant and refined study.

In the *third* lecture, the subject was the sap of plants. The difference between the sap in the alburnum or sap wood, and in the bark, was considered. Mucilaginous and saccharine matter abound in the sap of the alburnum of most trees and shrubs, and colouring and astringent matters are found in most cases in the sap of the bark. In large trees, the sap contains much less solid matter than in shrubs. In the sugar

cane, the proportion of saccharine and mucilaginous matter to the water is about as one to five. In the sugar maple it is about one to forty of the whole. In the beech, according M. Vauquelin, it is about one to forty-two; and in the elm, one to eighty-eight.

Mr. DAVY mentioned the relation of the different kinds of sap in trees, to the subject of engrafting. Grafts from fruit trees containing a saccharine sap, will not grow on trees, the sap of which is in the slightest degree astringent. In this part of the enquiry, Mr. Knight's observations upon the decay of grafts taken from old trees were made a topic of discussion, and it appeared probable from the facts, that the graft partakes of the disposition to old age, and decay of the parent tree; and that though it does not die at the same time by any Talicotian sympathy, yet it cannot by any means be made healthy and vigorous. All the favourite apples of the last century are gradually deteriorating. The golden pippin has not a fourth of the size described by

the old writers on gardening; and our hopes for new and excellent varieties must rest upon enlightened experiments on seedlings.

In the *fourth* lecture the peculiar fluids, or, as they have been called by some physiologists, the secreted fluids, of plants were considered.

The vessels in which they are contained seemed to be cylindrical, and of the largest size belonging to the vegetable system, and distributed through the alburnum as well as the bark.

The resinous, oily and aromatic matters found in plants are all probably contained in those vessels.

Mr. Davy pointed out some of the obvious uses of the secreted fluids, both for nourishing and conserving the parts. In seeds, the oily constituent which preserves them through the winter, becomes in the spring a part of the food of the plume and radicle. The aroma belonging to flowers, seems intended to preserve the essential, the reproductive parts, from attacks of insects, to which the volatile

oils appear to be peculiarly offensive, and even destructive. Multitudes of aphides are often seen upon the calyx of the rose, but they never dare to attack the petals, and there are many analogous instances.

The *fifth* lecture was principally devoted to the examination of the causes which influence the motion of the sap. The sap rises through the tubes of the alburnum, is modified in the caves, and seems to descend in the bark. Mr. Davy is inclined to refer this motion to physical causes chiefly. To capillary attraction, to expansions and contractions of the vessels, from changes of temperature, and to the great evaporation from the leaves.

He seemed to doubt of the presence of irritable contractile power in the fibres of vegetables, and shewed that the other agents were adequate to the effect. He decided against the idea of any circulation in the vegetable system, similar to that occurring in the animal system, in which the heart and arteries are inva-

riably active. And he detailed several instances of the inversion of the functions of the vessels, by merely changing the mode of application of external powers.

In the *sixth* lecture, water, soils, and the atmosphere, were considered, as far as they are connected with the nourishment of plants. Water and the matters in the soil which have once been organized, constitute the great part of their food received by the roots. Mr. Davy detailed the experiments of T. de Saussure, which prove that the earths found in the ashes of plants, is of the same kind as the earths of the soil in which they grow. He mentioned an original experiment, which seemed to shew that corn would not grow vigorously if wholly deprived of silicious earth, which, in the state of nature, constitutes its epidermis, and it has no power of forming this *substance*, which there is good reason for supposing elementary.—Mr. Davy gave an account of the experiments which shew that *carbonic acid* is absorbed and

decomposed by plants in the solar light and oxygen evolved. He seemed inclined to doubt whether they ever *evolved* carbonic acid in a state of health; and he mentioned some facts, which seemed to shew, that the carbonic acid which usually appears when plants are confined in darkness, in close vessels, is really owing to the decay of some of their dead parts. The epidermis, the heart wood or a single yellow spot in the leaf, would be fully adequate to such an effect.

THE *seventh* lecture was principally devoted to the consideration of the causes of germination and the circumstances that affect the health of plants. Mr. D. stated that seeds were incapable of germinating, unless supplied with heat, moisture, and air, and that oxygen is always absorbed in this process, and carbonic acid evolved. He mentioned Mr. Knight's experiments on the ascent of the stalk, and descent of the radicle, which seem to shew that gravitation is the principal cause of both these effects.

The chief diseases of the more perfect plants, he stated are produced either by parasitical vegetables, or by insects. Wet seasons conduce most to the propagation of mildew or blight; and dry weather to the increase of the turnip fly, and other analogous destructive insect tribes.

THE *eighth* and concluding lecture of the course, was upon the mode of the dissemination of seeds, and upon the progress of vegetation, in a state of nature. Rocks, according to Mr. D. by their decomposition. form asoil; different species in very different periods. Lichens and mosses are their first productions, and lastly a mold is formed capable of supporting grasses. Peat he considered as chiefly arising from the destruction of forests, exposed by the early cultivators of different countries by thinning their outskirts. Mr. D. made some general observations on the nature of different soils, and recommended new enquiries on this subject as peculiarly important to the agriculture of the country.

THE REV. Mr. DIBDIN, in his second lecture *on English Literature*, devoted the greatest part of it to extracts from Froissart; which tended to illustrate the characters of Edward, and his Queen Philippa, and afforded anecdotes of the civilization and literature of the age. An interesting anecdote was mentioned of Lord James Audley and the Black Prince, taken from the 1st volume of Mr. Johnes's edition of the Chronicles.

Mr. D. then gave a sketch of Froissart's life, chiefly from the biography of Monsieur de St. Palaye: he also alluded to the *poetry* of the historian, for it appeared that Froissart had composed not fewer than 30,000 verses! The abode of the celebrated GASTON, EARL of FOIX*,

* 'The Count,' says Froissart, 'when I put any question to him, answered it most readily; saying that the history I was employed upon would, in times to come, be more sought after than any other; because', added he, 'my fair sir, more gallant deeds of arms have been performed within the last 50 years, and more wonderful things have happened, than in 300 years before'. Johnes's edit. vol. iii. ch. 22.

the zealous patron and admirer of Froissart, was next described; and the character of that nobleman given, from the French of Monsieur de St. Palaye, in the following words:

'THE Count de Foix', says M. de St. P. 'was surnamed Phœbus, on account of his beauty; and Froissart could not have fixed upon a patron or a residence more congenial with his feelings and views. Although in his 59th year, he was esteemed the handsomest, the best-proportioned, and most powerful man of his age; dexterous in all athletic exercises, valorous, consummate in the art of war; noble and magnificent. No warrior visited him without carrying away proofs of his liberality. His castle was the rendezvous of all the brave captains of the age, who were distinguished in fight or in tournament. The only discourse heard there, was that which related to skirmishes, assaults, sieges, and pitched battles; and the only amusements encouraged, were those of wrestling, hunting, tilts and tournaments!'

THE character of Froissart as an historian, was largely entered into; and among other observations, descriptive of his excellencies, were the following: 'All the events,' said Mr. D. 'are described with a minuteness which bespeaks fidelity, and in a manner highly spirited and entertaining. You are introduced to, and become acquainted with, his heroes, before you accompany them to the field. You hear them express their gallant sentiments at the festive board, rise up with them from table, see them buckle on their armour, brandish their spears, and rush into the thickest ranks of the enemy, &c.' 'In one respect,' continued Mr. D. 'Froissart is eminently happy: he never *labours* at the description of his heroes; one anecdote, or speech, gives you full information of the character he describes; and, like the master-touch of an eminent artist, makes the picture complete without toiling at subordinate parts.'

THE lecture was concluded by a distinct notice of all the editions of Frois-

sart extant, from the black-lettered edition, in the 15th century, by Antony Verard, to the recent one of Mr. Johnes. Mr. D. observed, that Mr. Johnes was in possession of a unique and magnificent copy of an edition, printed by Eustace, in 1514, *and struck off upon vellum*, of which all the French bibliographers were ignorant.

Dr. Crotch has concluded a course of 13 lectures upon music. In the analysis of this course, it will be only necessary to notice its more prominent features.

In his introductory lecture, after recommending the cultivation of taste, Dr. C. proceeded to a consideration of the origin of melody and harmony. In the music of the antients, he considered whether it had any harmony, and whether the effects of this music were not in a great measure, owing to its union with poetry. He compared the effects of music with those of other arts, and in dividing it into styles, he particularly il-

lustrated the sublime, the beautiful, and the ornamental.

The course then took an extensive range of research, from the remains of antient music, to the last vocal and instrumental productions of Haydn. The various national airs were noticed, and beautiful specimens of each given upon the grand piano forte: as were many other specimens of the more eminent composers in the 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries.

The 7th and 8th lectures were devoted to Handel; the 7th to his early productions, his instrumental music, his operas and oratorios: the 8th to his oratorio of Israel in Egypt.

After noticing in his two succeeding lectures the most celebrated composers in the 18th century, and giving specimens of their several talents, Dr. C. confined his 11th lecture to Mozart, Pleyel, and Kozeluch; and his 12th, exclusively to Mozart's Requiem.

The 13th, devoted to the vocal and instrumental productions of Haydn, con-

cluded the course. The specimens performed and referred to in these lectures will shortly be published.

British Gallery.

The Gallery of the British Institution having closed as a school for the study of the works of the old masters, by the junior artists, preparations have been made for receiving the works of the Royal Academicians and other professional artists; whose merits may be found by the Committee of Directors, to be entitled to a place in their ensuing exhibition for sale.

By means of this Institution, it is hoped, without presumption, that the genius of each individual artist may be excited to shew its claims on public favour. A liberal patronage is never wanting where intrinsic merit is evinced; and we may conclude that as a material barrier to public notice is now removed, the

road to excellence need only be pointed out to be pursued. It should be the care of every British artist, animated by a love for his profession, and alive to his country's glory, that no signs of a retrograde movement be discoverable in any of his productions. If one part of the community be prompt to patronise, the other part immediately benefitted by such patronage, should certainly never be backward in acknowledging the good effects of it, by increasing successful efforts in all the departments of the ar,—in correctness of design, in spirit of composition, in purity of colouring, and truth of expression.

It is probable that the Gallery will open for public inspection about the 9th of February; and some account of the pictures exhibited for sale will regularly appear in the numbers of The Director.

ERRATA.

In the List of Subscribers, *for*—Fruin, Great Russel Street, *read* Tho. Pruen, Esq. Cheltenham.——*For* The Rev. W. Coxe, *read* The Rev. T. Coxe.

William Savage, Printer, Bedford Bury.